

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON LEARNER'S PERFORMANCE IN THE SELECTED SPECIAL UNDERGRADUATE BUSINESS PROGRAMME OF OPEN UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT. The main challenge in Open Distance Learning (ODL) environment today is providing education to as many people as possible. Besides open market, Open University Malaysia (OUM) has introduced special market in living up to the life-long learning principles with its flexibility and self-managed learning. As its motto states, OUM is a 'University for All: Opening Minds, Transforming Lives', special market has the potential to add value of learning environment in open and distance learning. Programmes in the special market are designed in consultation with the sponsors of specific groups or organisations and may be delivered varies in length as needed. Army College (KTD) has enrolled at the special programme of Diploma in Management with OUM. This is a comparative study on KTD learners using two different batches between intakes of December 2007 and December 2008. The primary purposes of this study are: 1) to compare the learner's performance between two different batches of KTD; and 2) to determine the impact of conducting different approach in teaching and learning system. The different approach of teaching and learning system is focused on daily learning hours, assessment format and the numbers of learner's intake. Information or inputs for this study are gathered directly from final results from the learners. Observations on the learner's results above are collected and analysed from two different batches based on different level of performance with high, medium and low. The outcome of this study will be useful to measure learner's performance after changes in the approach of teaching and learning system. The final result of this study will be able to show the different approaches in influencing learner's performance. Furthermore, recommendations will be proposed and suggested in hope for the business programme in special market to be further enhanced. It is also hoped that this study should inspire other researcher to explore the new approach of teaching and learning in ODL special market environment.

INTRODUCTION

The world of higher education has radically changes over the last few decades, more pronounced since beginning if the 21st century. This change was marked by the onward march of globalisation, the rise in student mobility, the increasing emphases on life-long learning, and the proliferation of open universities, growing role of private sector providers; and the advent of the internet, e-learning and virtual classrooms. All of these developments have profoundly altered the nature and delivery of higher education over the past few decades. The future undoubtedly holds further radical changes emanating from external as well as internal factors, including policy changes. Therefore, Open University Malaysia has formed alliances and collaboration with various organisations. This collaboration is parallel with the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010) in the second thrust: to raise the capacity for knowledge and innovation and nurture "first class mentality" under accelerating lifelong learning.

Education is the one of the most important subjects that was, is and will be discussed and talked about during the course of our lives. This is due to the magnitude and the importance of this issue and its outcomes for us and the country. As for the 9th Malaysia Plan, (year 2006- year 2010), 100% of total Malaysian should be literate by year 2020.

Open University Malaysia (OUM) has five faculties and one of it is Faculty of Business and Management (FBM). In order to capture and promote life-long learning to all nations in Malaysia, FBM has collaboration with certain organisations with special-customised programme such as Jusco and Army College (KTD) etc. There are other upcoming collaborations that FBM is foreseeing in the future. This study focuses on two batches of students of KTD with FBM in Diploma in Management programme. The usual duration to obtain a Diploma in Management is 3 years (approximately 9 semesters), while in KTD we customised it to be completed within 1 year or less with the same total

credit upon graduation, 90 credit hours. This collaboration is parallel and in line with OUM's new vision statement "To be the leading provider in flexible learning". OUM will seize the opportunity to provide education to all those who missed their education in their early days and people who wishes to continue education but has certain restrains such as handicapped (OKU), prison sentences etc with certain entry requirements to fulfill. In other words, OUM will provide education to those who wishes to upgrade themselves with education without compromising the quality of the assessment and delivery of courses provided.

Other than that, this special programme is different from the usual semester system for open market students. Open market students are engrossed with blended learning namely, self-managed learning (80%), face-to-face tutorials (8%) and online learning via forum (12%). The face-to-face tutorials normally take place every fortnight for five times each semester. However, only four times of face-to-face tutorials each semester which is conducted during weekdays for KTD Diploma in Management. Hence, it explains the shorter duration to complete the programme for KTD students. All the assessment for the subjects is the same as open market students. This step is to ensure the same quality of graduates from the same course.

This study is a comparative study on students in KTD using two different batches between intakes of December 2007 and December 2008. Three courses in Semester 1 have been chosen as a sample in this comparative study. The three courses are: i) Introductory Management; ii) Introductory Marketing; and iii) Learning Skills for Open Distance Learners. The teaching hours has been changed as compared from December 2007 to December 2008. Tentatively the teaching hours in the class are from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm, however, in December 2008, the teaching hours in the class are from 8.00 am to 1.50 pm. We plans to test the impact of these changes of teaching duration for the students based on their performance in their final examination.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of measuring performance in education cannot be underestimated. Haveman and Wolfe (1995) reported that the US government's expenditure on education in 1991 was 6.6 percent of Gross National Product (GNP) of US\$372 billion. In Canada, for year 2000-2001, government expenditure on education was CAD\$64 billion or 14.8 percent of the total government fiscal expenditures. The definition of "educational performance" is different for various stakeholders (Tam, 2001), but obviously, both the general public and educational professionals want to be sure that taxpayer dollars are well spent, and that students being educated today are well prepared to become productive nations of tomorrow. Educational performance is studied by practitioners and academics at both the kindergarten to post secondary school levels.

Based on Kostyantyn and Stainslav, (2005) study, the main educational process (i.e learning), though, takes place in a classroom via the interaction between an individual instructor and an individual student. Frequently, the first major piece of information about student performance becomes available in the middle of a semester (midterm examination results), or even at the end of a semester (final examination results). If a learning problem occurred early in the semester, a large amount of nonconforming output (students failing a class) may have been produced already. The earlier the problem is discovered, the lesser is the cost of failure and its impact to student knowledge.

The component of assessment and evaluation is perhaps the most important as it provides feedback and supports the other components. However, in Pakistan, the examinations system does not assess students' overall abilities. The examination reforms in year 2002 in Punjab province could not be implemented to the full scale due to a number of unavoidable reasons. Most of the researches conducted within the last two decades investigated poor performance level of primary grader students. The studies of Farooq (1990), and Saeed (1997) and Saeed, Bashir and Bushra (2005), found that the learning achievement of primary grade students is low.

Faculty are often encouraged by experts to improve student performance in distance learning courses through interpersonal communications, collaborations, effective organising and course design, understanding different student learning styles, and other suggestions (Bozik & Tracey, 2002, pp.207-225). The Hawkey study (Hawksley & Owen, 2002), established that good practice for distance

learning requires effective planning, monitoring, and managing resources for achieving high performance. While this is probably true for all types of educational courses, online courses require additional attention to detail.

As a field of study, performance of students in online distance learning courses is still in its infancy, and a large portion of the studies focus on comparing online distance learning with traditional on-campus courses. Most of the research finds that participants in well-designed distance learning courses perform as well as those in well-designed traditional courses, and that students enjoy the online medium because they are provided with access to instruction that may otherwise not be available to them. One analysis of teaching methodology for online business courses found that faculty achieved considerable learning success by using a case study approach, because such approaches work well in the virtual classroom and move students away from dependent learning styles (Nixon and Helms, 1997).

RESEARCH ANALYSIS

This study is conducted by selecting two batches of Kolej Tentera Darat (KTD) intakes of December 2007 and December 2008 to do a comparative study on students in KTD using two different teaching-hours system. Three courses namely: i) Introductory Management; ii) Introductory Marketing; and iii) Learning Skills for Open Distance Learners have been chosen as a sample in this comparative study. These courses are chosen because these are the three first subjects offered to students in KTD for Diploma in Management. In addition, the new teaching-hours is newly implemented on the January Semester of December 2008 intake with its first batch of students. The primary purposes of this study are:

- to compare the learner's performance between two different batches of KTD; and
- to determine the impact of conducting different approach in teaching and learning system.

The different approach of teaching and learning system is focused on daily learning hours, assessment format and the numbers of learner's intake. In order to conduct this study, learner's result from two different batches will be analysed based on different level of performance with high, medium and low.

Table 1 is the table showing a summary of comparison between KTD special market programme with open market programme in delivery of teaching:

Table 1

KTD Special Market Diploma in Management Programme	Open Market Diploma in Management Programme.
Within 1 year or less to complete	3 years to complete
Everyday class each week per semester	Face-to-face tutorial class five times each semester
90 credits hours to graduation	90 credit hours to graduation
30 subjects to complete upon graduation	30 subjects to complete upon graduation
Assessment: Assignment, midterm and final exam	Assessment: Assignment, midterm and final exam
Blended learning pedagogy	Blended learning pedagogy

Table 2 below shows the summary of difference between the teaching system for January Semester of intakes of December 2007 and December 2008:

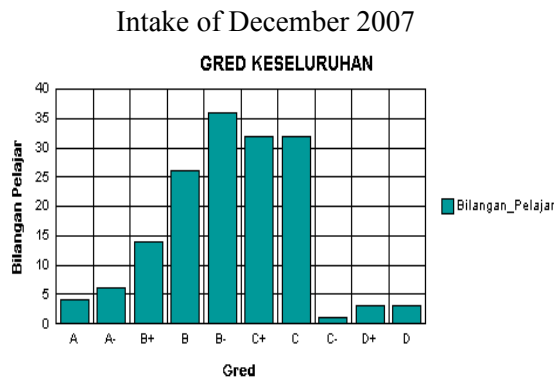
Table 2

January Semester Intake of December 2007	January Semester Intake of December 2008
Everyday class from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm	Everyday class from 8.00 am to 1.50 pm
Assessment: Assignment, quiz and final examination	Assessment: Assignment, midterm and final exam
Assessment midterm exam : None	Assessment midterm exam : Part A and Part B
Assessment final exam: Part A, B and C	Assessment final exam: Part A and Part B only

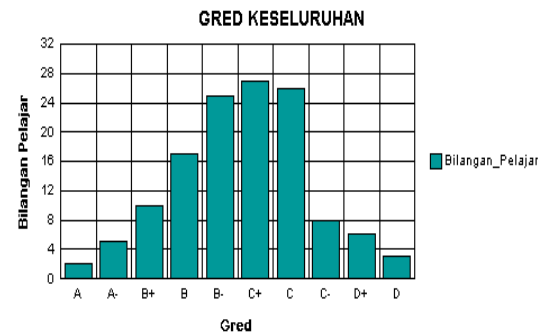
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Table 3a and 3b below show the summary of difference between the results of KTD students in Introductory Marketing (BDPM1103) for January Semester intakes of December 2007 and December 2008:

Table 3a



Intake of December 2008



Note:

Gred Keseluruhan = Overall Grades
Bilangan Pelajar = Number of Students
Gred = Grade

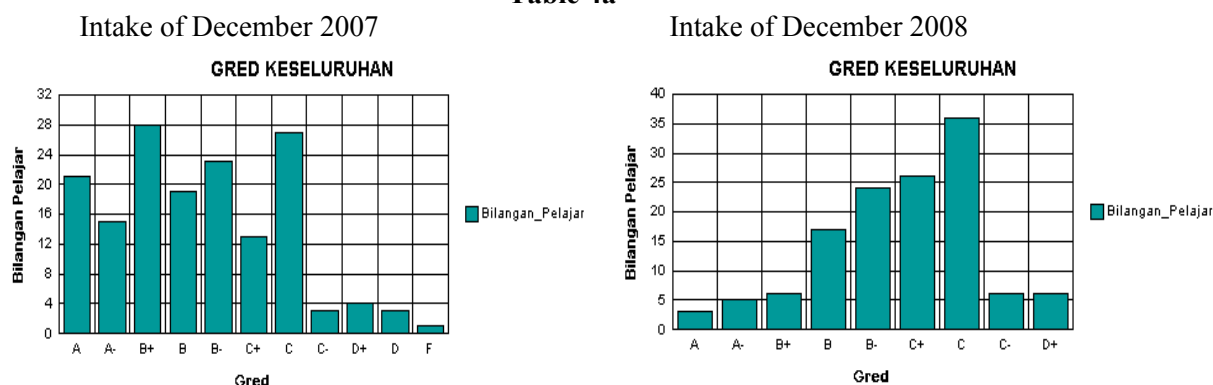
Table 3b

	Intake of December 2007	Intake of December 2008
Mean	60.61	58.51
Standard Deviation	9.1	9.52
Median	61	58.6
Mod	50	50

From the table 3a and 3b above, it can be seen that both intakes share an average grades of B, B-, C+ and C. The analysis of overall results between intakes of December 2007 and December 2008 for the subject of Introductory Marketing are summarised as below:

- mean: decrease of 2.1%
- standard deviation: slightly increase of 0.42%
- median: slightly decrease of 2.4%

Table 4a and 4b shows the summary of difference between the results of KTD students in Introductory Management (BDPP1103) for January Semester intakes of December 2007 and December 2008:

Table 4a


Note:

Gred Keseluruhan = Overall Grades
Bilangan Pelajar = Number of Students
Gred = Grade

Table 4b

	Intake of December 2007	Intake of December 2008
Mean	64.58	58.24
Standard Deviation	12.79	8.87
Median	65	57.3
Mod	-	50

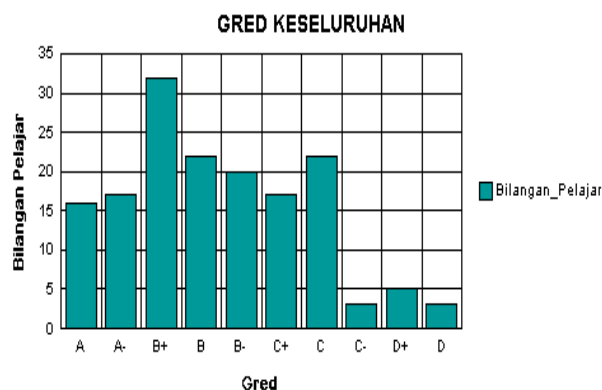
From the table 4a and 4b above, it can be seen that 146 students (93%) from intake of December 2007 obtained C grades and above. Meanwhile, 117 students (91%) from December 2008 intake also obtained C grades and above. However, further analysis of overall grades between intakes of December 2007 and December 2008 shows that the difference in the percentage of students that obtained grades A and B in the course was found to be significant. The percentage of students who obtained A grades decreases 17% as well as B grades decreases 8.15%. The analysis of overall results between intakes of December 2007 and December 2008 for the subject of Introductory Management are summarised as below:

- i) mean: decrease of 6.34%
- ii) standard deviation: decrease of 3.92%
- iii) median: decrease of 7.7%

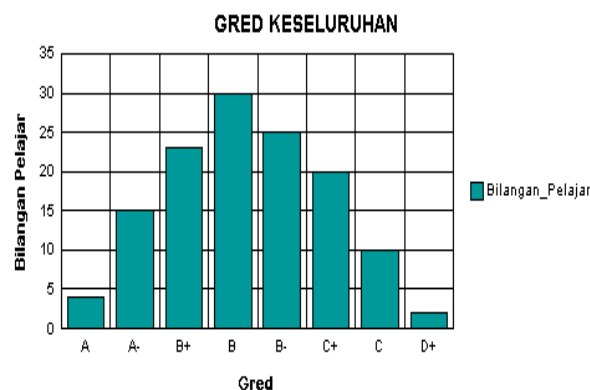
Table 5a and 5b below shows the summary of difference between the results of KTD students in Learning Skills for Open and Distance Learners (OUMH1103) for January Semester intakes of December 2007 and December 2008:

Table 5a

Intake of December 2007



Intake of December 2008



Note:

Gred Keseluruhan = Overall Grades
Bilangan Pelajar = Number of Students
Gred = Grade
Table 5b

	Intake of December 2007	Intake of December 2008
Mean	64.9	65.45
Standard Deviation	11.51	8.35
Median	66.5	66
Mod	50	54.6

From the table 5a and 5b above, difference patterns of overall grades are shown between both intakes. The highest grade in intake of December 2007 is B+ with 20.38% and the lowest grade is D (1.91%). Meanwhile, the highest grade in December 2008 intake is B with 23.26% and the lowest grade is D+ (1.55%). Further analysis shows that the difference in the percentage of students in most of the grades between intakes of December 2007 and December 2008 was found to be significant. The decrease percentage of students who obtained A grade is 7% and the decrease percentage of students who get B+ grade is 2.6%. However, there is a highly increase in B grade with 9.3% and C+ with 4.7%. Although the percentage of A and B grades are decreased, the results of December 2008 intake are considered as better results with none of students obtained D grade. The analysis of overall results between intakes of December 2007 and December 2008 for the subject of Learning Skills for Open and Distance Learners are summarised as below:

- i) mean: increase of 0.55%
- ii) standard deviation: decrease of 3.16%
- iii) median: decrease of 0.5%

From the analysis, we found out that the performance of all the three papers BDPM1103, BDPP1103 and OUMH1103 decrease slightly in terms of grading as well as overall performance after the changes of hours spent in classroom and changes in assessment format. Although the mean score difference for BDPM1103 (Introductory Marketing) between intakes of December 2007 and December 2008 is relatively low and insignificant with only 2.1%, the performance of this paper is undeniably decrease by the students. We believe that this decremental may be due to the changes of the hours spent in the classroom and changes of assessment format between these two semesters. There are several steps and measures that we would like to recommend to incorporate a better teaching and learning for this special programme:

- Tutors who are appointed to conduct this special programme should be of highly-appraised attitude. Eg. High and on-going motivation level. Besides the classroom class, KTD students schedule is relatively packed with army training, marching etc, hence motivated tutors will most likely able to lift up their motivation and determination to excel in their studies. This is as accordance to Lim, T.M., (2008), indicated that one of the categories in appraising tutors indentified by students is “the right attitude”.
- Tutors should be highly encouraged to prepare and provide additional exercises/ worksheets with answers key for students. This will be able to assist and enhance students’ grasp of the subjects.
- A high level and volume of interactions and discussions should be conducted in this special class as students will be able to voice out their opinions and views in certain concepts and issues regarding the subjects.
- Lastly, a short revision should be allocated in each tutorial session approximately 30 minutes to recall their minds on the topics and areas covered earlier in the class.

This preliminary study is the first step in analysing the performance of this special programme in OUM after the changes of the classroom-hours and assessment format. A further study on the performance of KTD programme for higher-year subjects can be conducted in order for OUM to capture a better teaching and learning for this special-collaborated programme.

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